



Texas Education Policy Prospects for 2009

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by Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

In 2009, the Texas legislature will find itself at another historical crossroad. Does it strive to provide equitable and high quality public education for its students, or does it settle for more gloss-over Band-Aids that merely give rhetorical cover for its leaders? The challenges range from funding equity to dropout prevention and from serving limited-English-proficient (LEP) pupils to high-stakes testing.

More specifically, the state is facing the need to improve educational equity in the funding system that was revised in 2006 and left uncorrected in 2007. It needs to deal with its failure to effectively monitor programs for LEP pupils and its woefully inadequate secondary level English language learner programs. In fact, the state's perpetual failure to address, let alone to close, the achievement gap between LEP and non-LEP students has once again put it in a position of having to respond to a court mandate to address the issue.

In addition, the state faces its continuing need to address the

dropout problem, which recent IDRA research indicates remains at levels comparable to those found in our 1986 study. Additional reforms are needed in the state's ever-expanding and dysfunctional disciplinary alternative education program. There are needed changes related to high-stakes testing and in-grade retention. And finally, the state faces maintaining the opportunities created for under-represented schools and students in the face of persistent pressure from suburban interests to weaken if not eliminate this reform.

These are but a few of the major challenges confronting the 2009 Texas legislature. Whether they are up to the task remains to be seen. Following is a brief overview of each issue.

School Finance Reform

Testimony presented at hearings convened by the education committees of the Texas House and Senate indicates growing pressure to improve the public school funding system in at least four areas. Evidence suggests that the use of what is referred to as "target revenue" has grown to totally disrupt the relationship between local tax effort and local per pupil revenues mandated in the

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early *Edgewood* court rulings. Target revenue is a *hold harmless* mechanism created in the 2006 special session to ensure that no district receives less funding per pupil than was provided prior to those reforms. This makes the target revenue mechanism a shadow funding plan that over-rides the existing finance formulae, and it is contributing to growing inequality among the state's high and low property wealth school systems. Finance experts also agree that the state must increase its share of funding lest it invite new challenges that will once again claim that the system does not provide sufficient support to implement even an adequate educational program.

A second school finance issue is the recognized need to limit or eliminate the inequity created by the re-introduction of *unequalized enrichment* where some school districts are allowed to generate and keep significantly more revenue than other systems. Because of great differences in local property wealth among Texas school systems, it is this portion of the Texas public

The state's perpetual failure to address, let alone to close, the achievement gap between LEP and non-LEP students has once again put it in a position of having to respond to a court mandate to address the issue.

school funding system that contributes greatly to the school funding inequality that has re-surfaced in the state over the last few years.

Third, Texas educators will press for increases in salaries that have begun to lag notably behind other states.

And fourth, special program funding for programs serving students in the process of learning English or who meet free- and reduced-price lunch criteria will be carried over to 2009 education discussions.

For more information on school funding issues in Texas, see "The Status of School Finance Equity in Texas" in the May 2008 issue of the *IDRA Newsletter*.

Bilingual Education and Secondary Level LEP Programs

Texas has been ordered by a federal district court to revise its bilingual education monitoring system and significantly improve the educational services provided to pupils who are identified as LEP at the secondary (middle school and high school) level. While an appeal is expected in the case, the evidence presented at trial (including data provided by IDRA) clearly demonstrated that the existing monitoring system fails to deal with under-identification of LEP pupils by school districts or with excessive requests to opt-out of the recommended bilingual or English as a second language (ESL) programs;

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The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. The purpose of the organization is to disseminate information concerning equality of educational opportunity.

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Bilingual Education in Texas

Where It is Now, and What is Still Needed

**by Albert Cortez, Ph.D., and
Roy L. Johnson, M.S.**

Background – Programs Become Required for Serving LEP Students in Texas

The state of Texas was an early pioneer in providing academic instruction to children using their native language while simultaneously developing proficiency in English. In 1968, then State Representative Joe Bernal of San Antonio championed a state law removing a prohibition that was in place at the time and allowing for voluntary local implementation of bilingual programs in Texas schools.

Affecting schools across the country in 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that simply providing the same all-English program to limited-English-proficient (LEP) and to non-LEP students violated federal requirements relating to equal educational opportunity, setting the stage for new approaches in states around the country.

In 1981, in a successful lawsuit brought by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), plaintiffs challenged the state of Texas' efforts to offset the

effects of past discrimination against Mexican Americans by merely making programs voluntary. As a result of that litigation, the state revised the mandate and required school systems to offer bilingual education programs in elementary grades, English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual programs at post-elementary grades through eighth grade, and ESL programs in high school. This revised state law (SB 477) was authored by State Senator Carlos Truan of Corpus Christi and co-sponsored by State Representative Matt García of San Antonio. The new legislation also prescribed uniform procedures for student identification and placement, established exit criteria for students to be transitioned out of the mandated program, and slightly increased state funding based on numbers of LEP students served. No major changes were incorporated into the program over the ensuing decade.

This summer, however, a federal district court ordered the state to improve its monitoring of programs serving LEP students and to improve LEP programs at the middle and high school levels. The ruling points out that high schools and middle schools in Texas are losing English language learners at twice the rate of other students. See the article on Page 1 for more about upcoming policy debates.

In addition, in October, at the annual Texas Association for Bilingual Education conference, IDRA's president and CEO, María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., presented a research-based preliminary framework that provides guidance for design, implementation and evaluation of an effective ELL program (see Page 5).

An Increasing Need in Texas

The number of pupils identified as LEP has increased steadily over the last 26 years since the program was mandated in Texas. In 1975, the state of Texas reported a total LEP enrollment of about 25,000 students. The LEP count had grown to more than 425,000 students by 1993-94 and to 775,432 pupils in 2007-08. The table in the box on Page 4 reports LEP enrollment in Texas schools from 1993-94 to 2007-08, reflecting a steady increase in that student population over time.

Over this recent period, LEP enrollments have constituted an ever increasing proportion of the state's public school population accounting for 11.8 percent of the total number of students in 1993-94 and 16.6 percent in 2007-08. Cumulatively, this represents an LEP student increase of 349,492, or a 82.1 percent gain in a 14-year span

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– a growth rate that far exceeds the overall growth in state enrollments in PK-12.

Historical data for the years 1995 through 2008 reveal that LEP pupils in Texas have historically been concentrated at the lower elementary grades, with LEP counts and percentages decreasing notably after third grade. In fact, in 2007-08, 61 percent of all Texas LEP pupils were enrolled in grades PK-3. LEP enrollments at grades 4 through 6 accounted for 20.3 percent of LEP pupils.

LEP concentrations at the middle and high school levels (7 to 12) accounted for only 18.7 percent of all Texas LEP students in any one year. On the other hand, that percentage converts to more than 145,000 pupils. This trend is reflected in LEP grade level distributions for 2007-08 summarized

in the box on Page 17.

This trend of decreasing LEP student counts as one goes up the grade levels, documented in the state's tracking study of LEP student status over time, occurs in large part because LEP students tend to be transitioned out of bilingual programs after an average of three years or less. Immigrant pupils only account for 13 percent of Texas LEP enrollments in grades PK to 12, reflecting that the issue is not one limited to recent immigrant students.

Texas ESL Program Requirements

At the middle school level, bilingual programs or ESL programs may be implemented as a local option. In the high school grades, however, ESL is the required program. According to Texas Education Agency data, more than 230,000 LEP pupils in grades PK-

While the state program provides supplemental targeted funding for schools serving LEP students, the funding levels have long been recognized as less than what is needed to provide appropriate services.

12 were served using ESL programs.

Texas is one of a handful of states that requires school districts to implement bilingual or ESL programs for its LEP students, more commonly referred as "English language learners" in many other states around the country. A major factor accounting for its continuation is that the elementary program has been found to be effective both in helping students learn sufficient English to transition to the all-English curriculum and because students served in the program for the most part perform at acceptable levels on state academic assessments. The track record of the ESL program required at the secondary level however has been far less than impressive.

What Is Still Needed

While the program has persisted, few bilingual education advocates would propose that all areas of the program are acceptable. One long-standing issue involves persistent **shortages of bilingual education certified teachers**. In 2006, the Texas State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) reported that, in that year, 867 teachers working in bilingual classes lacked required certification (2007). Assuming an average class load of 20 pupils, this means that as many as 17,300 LEP pupils were served by less than fully qualified staff. This number does not include teachers enrolled in alternative certification programs or

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LEP Student Enrollment and Total Student Enrollment In Texas, 1993-94 to 2007-08

Year	LEP Count	Total Texas Public School Enrollment	LEP as Percent of Total Enrollment
1993-94	425,940	3,601,839	11.8
1994-95	455,224	3,670,196	12.4
1995-96	479,390	3,740,260	12.8
1996-97	514,139	3,828,975	13.4
1997-98	519,793	3,891,877	13.4
1998-99	533,741	3,945,367	13.5
1999-00	555,334	3,991,783	13.9
2000-01	570,453	4,059,619	14.1
2001-02	600,922	4,146,653	14.5
2002-03	630,148	4,239,911	14.9
2003-04	660,308	4,311,502	15.3
2004-05	684,007	4,383,871	15.6
2005-06	711,237	4,505,572	15.8
2006-07	731,304	4,576,933	16.0
2007-08	775,432	4,671,493	16.6

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, 1993-94 to 2007-08

Presenting IDRA's Framework for Effective Instruction of Secondary English Language Learners

by **María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.**

In July 2008, Judge William Wayne Justice ruled that the state of Texas failed to effectively educate secondary level English language learners and to monitor school district compliance with Equal Educational Opportunity Act and state policy related to secondary English language learners.

In October 2008, at the annual Texas Association for Bilingual Education conference, IDRA's president, Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, presented a research-based framework that provides guidance for design, implementation and evaluation of an effective English language learner program. Her presentation was part of a panel discussion on "A Critical Examination of Judge William Wayne Justice's July 2008 Decision Regarding Education of ELLs: Provisions of the Case and Implications."

Dr. Robledo Montecel challenged participants to find ways in which the "palpable injustice" cited by Judge Justice against English language learners is no longer tolerated. Citing IDRA research presented to the court indicating that English language learners have substantially higher failure rates, higher retention rates and

higher dropout rates than other students, she stressed that the denial of equal educational opportunity to tens of thousands of children who do not speak English must stop. She noted that the State of Texas and the Texas Education Agency must meet their responsibility to "ensure that school districts are providing equal educational opportunity in all schools" as required by the court.

The panel was moderated by Norma Cantú, professor of law and education at the University of Texas at Austin. Other panelists included: Dr. Joe J. Bernal, former member of the Texas State Board of Education and former member of the Texas legislature, focusing along with Dr. Robledo Montecel on the topic of "Historical Antecedents with Focus on the U.S. vs. Texas Case"; David Hinojosa, education litigation attorney with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), focusing on the topic of "State Failing Students with Limited English Skills: The Justice Court Abrupt Reversal"; The Honorable Roberto R. Alonzo, Texas state representative, focusing on the topic of "The Mexican American Legislative and Senate Hispanic Caucuses' Response"; and Dr. José Agustín Ruiz-Escalante, president of TABE, Dr. Leo Gómez, professor at the University of Texas Pan Ameri-



can, and Jesse Romero, legislative consultant with TABE, BEAM and ENABLE, focusing on the topic of "The TABE Action Plan."

The framework presented by Dr. Robledo Montecel and that is provided on the following two pages outlines seven key components: state leadership, oversight and compliance; governance; fair funding; parent and community engagement; student achievement and support; teaching and curriculum quality; and accountability. It is intended to serve as a basis for further action at all levels of the Texas education system from the state education agency to individual school campuses and their communities.

María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., is the IDRA president and CEO. Comments and questions may be directed to her via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

A Framework for Effective Instruction of Secondary English Language Learners

Overarching Principle

Access to quality education is a right of all children.

High quality schooling that provides equal educational opportunities for secondary English language learners (ELLs) must include seven key components: state leadership, oversight and compliance; governance; fair funding; parent and community engagement; student achievement and support; teaching and curriculum quality; and accountability. Each component is defined by research-based elements.

State Leadership, Oversight and Compliance

- **Design and Implement a Robust Monitoring and Compliance System:** TEA's oversight and compliance responsibilities must address a monitoring system that reviews: (1) adherence of program design to quality program standards; (2) fidelity of implementation; and (3) high comparable academic achievement of ELL students and that ensures state and local accountability for the educational success of all ELL students.
- **Legislate Appropriate Policies and Funding:** State legislators must ensure that appropriate policies and funding that support research-based and effective instruction of ELL students are in place and include school accountability measures.
- **Generate Responsive and Practical Rules and Regulations:** The commissioner must ensure that state rules and regulations reflect the spirit and intent of the law as it relates to high comparable achievement for all ELL students.

Governance

- **Make Education of ELLs a Priority:** Educational success of ELLs must be a priority for school boards and be reflected in local school policy and campus improvement plans.
- **Require Administrator Support and Leadership:** Administrators must establish the education and success of ELLs as a high priority that includes consistent program monitoring, evaluation and appropriate modifications in service delivery to ensure student success.

Fair Funding

- **Provide Equitable Funding:** Quality education for ELLs requires equitable funding based on actual costs and provided through a weighted student approach.
- **Target Funding for Specific Services to ELLs:** Provisions must be in place to ensure that funding provided for ELLs is actually used for the delivery of services for those students.

Parent and Community Engagement

- **Engage Parents as Equal Partners:** Schools must engage parents of ELL students as equal partners in the design and implementation of school-based solutions.
- **Involve Community:** Schools must ensure that communities participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of educational services provided for ELLs.

Student Achievement and Support

- **Expect High Comparable Achievement:** Schools must establish high comparable achievement and performance goals and expectations for ELL students compared to non-ELLs at the state level.
- **Implement Reliable and Research-Based Student Identification and Placement Procedures:** Secondary ELLs must be identified using psychometrically-sound English language proficiency and appropriate achievement assessment measures administered by qualified staff.
- **Provide Appropriate Validation Processes:** Identification and placement must be made by the

LPAC, in accordance with state required procedures, and also must include information and validation of the ELL student's previous educational experience.

- **Create and Implement Networks of Student Support:** Networks of support, such as student learning communities, mentors and coaches, must be available to ELLs.
- **Ensure Non-Segregated Settings:** Schools must ensure that ELL students are not segregated in campus and school district activities.
- **Provide Overall Student Support:** Schools must ensure that ELL students experience the social, psychological and cognitive support to succeed in school.
- **Ensure Equal Participation in Extracurricular Activities:** ELL student participation in extracurricular activities must be comparable with non-ELL students.

Teaching and Curriculum Quality

- **Provide Qualified Staff:** All ELL students must be taught by teachers who are appropriately certified in the content area and English as a second language (ESL).
- **Provide Continuous Professional Development:** In addition to ESL teachers of record, all staff serving ELL students must be provided continuous professional development in effective, research-based practices serving ELLs.
- **Design and Implement a Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum that Prepares ELLs for College:** A curriculum must be designed specifically for ELLs and must meet the rigor and relevance requirements of the state's standard curriculum.
- **Implement Research-Based Instructional Strategies:** Instruction of ELLs must integrate the development of content with the simultaneous development of English language skills.
- **Provide Appropriate Supplemental Instructional Services:** Appropriate supplemental instructional programs and activities must be accessible to ELLs who are not reaching state, district and campus achievement goals.

- **Ensure Academic Success Before Exiting:** ELL students must be required to meet comparable high achievement in the content areas, including English language proficiency, as measured through the state-mandated test.
- **Monitor for Sustainability of Academic Success:** Academic progress of former ELL students must be monitored for two years after exiting and appropriate measures taken, such as re-enrolling or re-adjusting curriculum for students who do not maintain acceptable academic performance levels.

Accountability

- **Implement a Multi-Dimensional Monitoring System:** Local monitoring must be multi-dimensional and occur around three major activities: (1) adherence of program design to quality program standards; (2) fidelity of implementation; and (3) high comparable academic achievement of ELL students.
- **Hold the State, School Districts and Campuses Accountable:** Schools must be held accountable for the high comparable academic achievement of all ELL students and must inform parents and community of progress in meeting district and campus goals.

Selected Resources

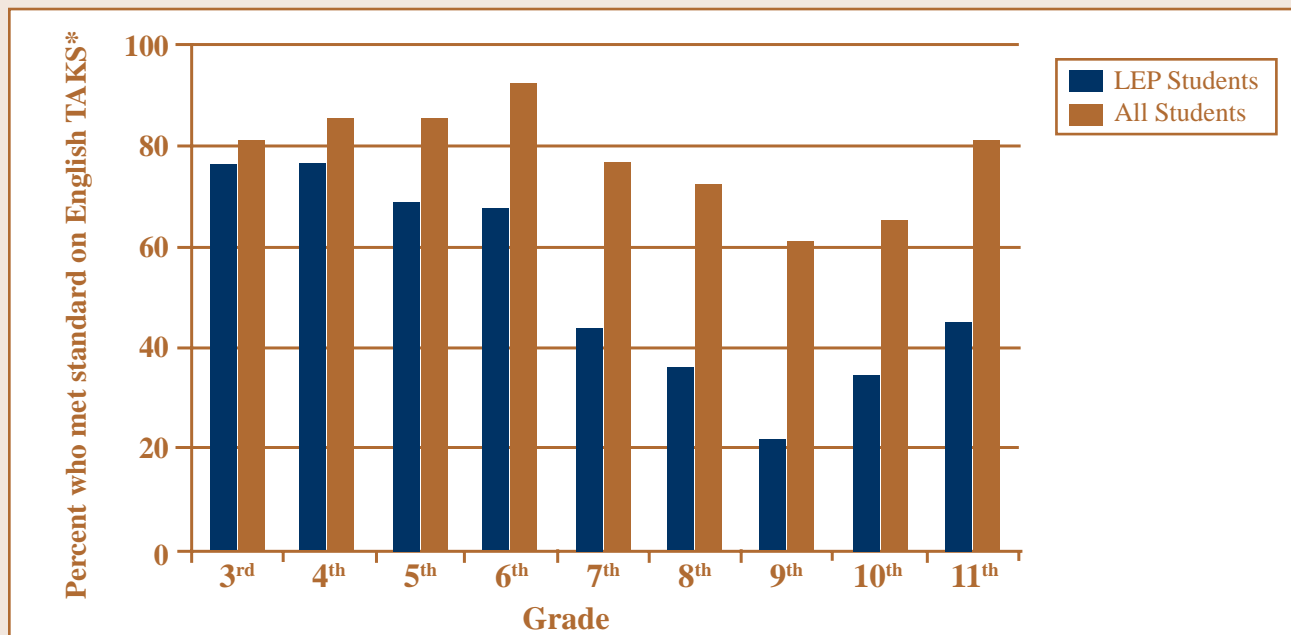
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- **Policy Research Report No. 10: Academic Achievement of Elementary Students with Limited English Proficiency in Texas Public Schools.** (1998, January). Texas Education Agency.

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IDRA is an independent, private non-profit organization, directed by María Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., dedicated to creating schools that work for all children. As a vanguard leadership development and research team for more than three decades, IDRA has worked with people to create self-renewing schools that value and empower all children, families and communities. IDRA conducts research and development activities, creates, implements and administers innovative education programs and provides teacher, administrator, and parent training and technical assistance.

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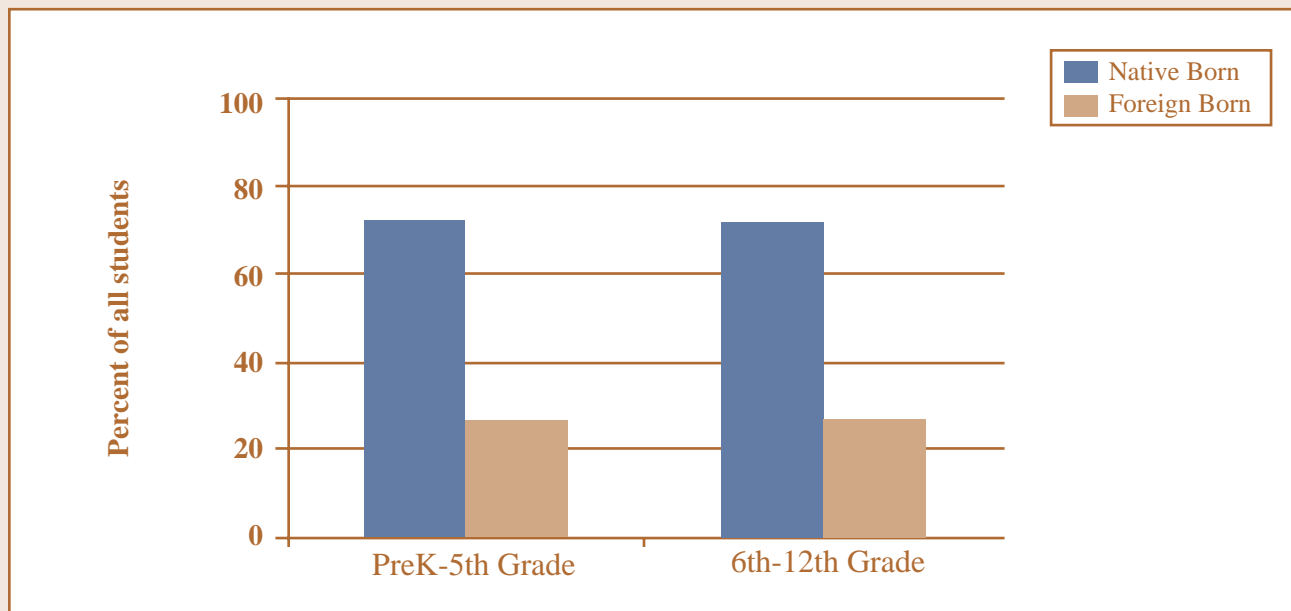
Math Achievement of Limited-English-Proficient Students in Texas in 2007



*Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, 2006-07.

Percent of Texas School Children Who are Native Born or Foreign Born



Source: *New Demography of America's Schools*, Urban Institute, 2005.



The Power of Listening to Young Voices

by Josie Danini Cortez, M.A.

Last year, the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative published *Deprived of Dignity, Degrading Treatment and Abusive Discipline in New York City and Los Angeles Public Schools* (Sullivan, 2007). NESRI cites the Convention on the Rights of the Child, “The most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world requires schools to provide an environment where children feel safe, supported and are able to learn regardless of race, class, age, language or other factors” (2007). The authors go on to cite Article 29 of the Convention, “Education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential [and] the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Since its inception, the Intercultural Development Research Association has taken a stand for children, giving voice when others would not. For more than 35 years, the organization has dedicated itself to ensuring that all children have an equitable and excellent education, especially those who often are disenfranchised. We have worked with countless teachers, administrators, families, communities and policymakers to make sure schools

“Children do not lose their human rights by virtue of passing through the school gates... Education must be provided in a way that respects the inherent dignity of the child.”

– U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child,
General Comment 1, Executive Summary,
Deprived of Dignity

are places where “children feel safe, supported and are able to learn regardless of race, class, age, language or other factors.”

IDRA’s work is based on a fundamental premise, “*All children and valuable; none is expendable.*” When schools begin with the premise that all children are valuable, then students are precious assets, families are meaningful partners and teachers and administrators are fully engaged in making sure all students develop to their fullest potential. And students have a voice that is listened to by the adults who teach them and who make decisions that affect their lives.

IDRA amplifies student voices

so they resonate clearly with those entrusted with their future. Thirty-five years ago, Dr. José Angel Cárdenas, IDRA founder and director emeritus, listened to children who were being denied their fundamental right to an excellent education because of where they lived, and what they said became IDRA. Twenty-five years ago, we listened to students who had left high school before graduating, and what they told us in IDRA’s Dallas Dropout Study became IDRA’s Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – a program that has made an extraordinary difference in the lives of more than 25,000 students in the United States, Puerto Rico, the United Kingdom and Brazil by keeping 98 percent of them in school.

When students are asked what they think, they are being taught that they are active and meaningful participants in their education and that what they have to say *matters*. This is especially important for students who rarely have a chance to speak or who are usually heard through a filter imposed by some adults – a filter that says they are “at risk” or are “troublemakers.” When these students are asked to voice their concerns, their issues, their solutions, and adults respond with

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The Power of Listening – continued from Page 9

respect, dignity and action, students learn to *speak up*. Here are a few examples of IDRA eliciting student voices and how their opinions and insights make a difference.

Student Voice for Program Accountability

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutors tell us through monthly journal entries, pre- and post-tests and case study interviews whether or not the program is having its proven transformational impact.

“This past month, the best thing about tutoring was that I helped my tutees a lot with their reading so they can read better and be somebody in this life so they can like school better and not drop out like some other kids in Texas that have dropped out. I will never drop out because I like school just like my tutees.”

“The best thing about tutoring was when my tutees told me I was the best tutor in the world... Doesn’t that make you feel better if you are having

a bad day? To me, tutoring is the best thing that has happened to me in a long time.”

Student Voice: Speaking Truth to Power

Student voice became a critical part of IDRA’s *Brown and Mendez* Blueprint Dialogues for Action as students were asked how the promise of *Brown vs. Board of Education* and *Mendez vs. Westminster* has yet to be fulfilled in their schools. During the dialogue event in Albuquerque, IDRA worked with local students from Albuquerque public high schools to learn about the landmark cases and, with the help of Critical Exposure, photographically capture their school realities, in the context of *Brown* and *Mendez*.

Students then formally presented their photographs and perspectives to the dialogue participants who were charged with developing the community blueprints for change. The students’ images reveal both progress made in the 50 years since the *Brown*

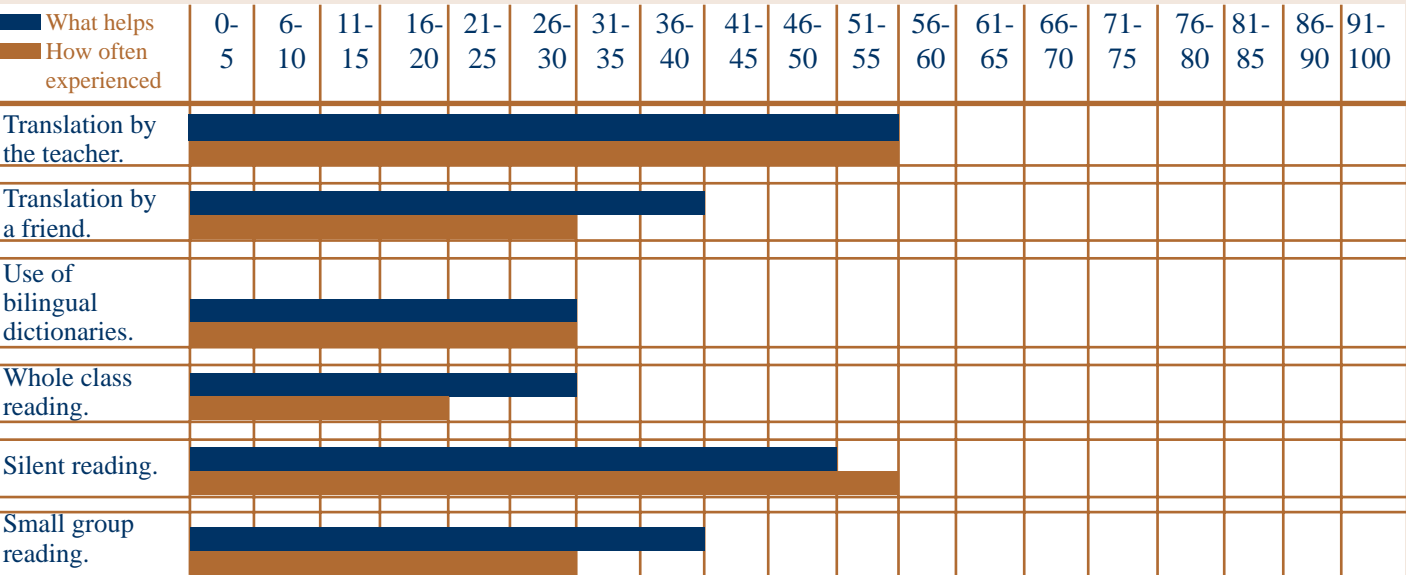


Broken Fence
Fatimah Martin, Grade 11

decision and the need for continuing efforts to ensure that all students have access to a high quality education. The images and stories set the context and tone for what remains to be done and the call to action that faces the Albuquerque community.

The Power of Listening – continued on Page 19

Student Survey Responses:
What helps you learn English and how often are these activities done in your classroom? (percent very much and much)



Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2008

Creating Culturally Responsive Parent Engagement

Principal Shares Strategies for Success

by Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., Rogelio López del Bosque, Ed.D., and Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D.

Creating an atmosphere for purposeful parent engagement and partnership that is culturally responsive and that permeates throughout a school district begins with governance and school administrative leaders, the superintendent and school principal. These leaders set the tone for parent engagement that establishes a rhythm of student success that can permeate a district, the school and the community.

There is abundant evidence in the literature that underscores the impact of engagement on achievement, graduation rates and college readiness. This article will address the question of implementation: *What can I do to ensure that culturally responsive engagement takes place?* It also shares effective and proven strategies used in schools that serve a diverse student body, particularly at the secondary level.

There is power in reflecting on this question with a positive intent to deepen our skills as professional educators. No matter where we are in the equation to

support parent engagement – whether we are beginning or we are experienced teachers or whether we are advocates or not of parent engagement – it is useful to spend some honest, thoughtful time considering the question of *how* we are engaging with parents and *why* we are doing so (or not).

Elements of an Engagement Atmosphere

We can look forward to much more success in student achievement by creating a culturally responsive, positive environment for parent engagement. This is critical because it sets the stage of readiness for engagement for parents, teachers, administrators and community members to work more closely together. Seven critical

elements are evident in this type of atmosphere:

- Having a commitment to consult and engage parents in school decisions that impact the quality of education provided;
- Creating a school culture where parents are seen as important partners in the school's efforts to increase student success;
- Developing and posting around the school a code for effective parent engagement;
- Operationalizing the code by involving school staff and parents in a community of practice;
- Articulating high expectations for success in the engagement process;
- Measuring regularly and ensuring

Strategies for Success – continued on Page 12



Listen to a related episode

Families and Teachers Communicating

IDRA Classnotes Podcast – Episode 43

After recently serving as a high school principal for five years, Dr. Rogelio López del Bosque shares how he created a culture of engagement among teachers and parents that welcomed and even expected dialog for student success.



www.idra.org/podcasts

that the quality of engagement is high and focused on the anticipated outcome of success for every student; and

- Implementing specific steps for parent engagement and evaluating the impact on student success.

In considering the quality of *how* we are engaging with parents, it is useful to take time to reflect on the following questions and to engage in thoughtful analysis of our personal practice in parent engagement as educators.

- As an educator, do I consistently value and acknowledge the strengths and gifts that parents from diverse backgrounds and languages can bring to the teaching and learning process? How do I do so?
- Am I willing to implement varied approaches to engage parents from diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds meaningfully as partners in a community of learners?
- Do I facilitate engagement that is relevant to parents' context and needs, and do I set the tone of respectful readiness to begin to partner effectively with a diverse group of parents?
- As an educator, do I pro-actively invite *all* parents to be part of critical thinking activities, sharing in meaningful planning with them? How do I do so?
- Do I promote positive parent engagement practices with colleagues, teachers, staff and others in the school and advocate the mutual benefits of such engagement for parents, teachers and students?
- How would I describe my state of interaction with parents: tired, enthusiastic, stressed, forced, open, relaxed, or willing to hear and implement new ideas and perspectives?
- What am I doing regularly to assess the quality and responsiveness of

Tools for

Enlightened Public Policy

IDRA emerged in 1973 as the only entity in the state dedicated exclusively to the reform of the public school finance system. IDRA conducted the necessary research to substantiate the claims made earlier by the plaintiffs in the *Rodríguez vs. San Antonio ISD*, which had been overturned. IDRA provided state agencies and others with extensive information on the need for reform; prepared and distributed materials; and awakened educators, lawmakers, government officials and the general public to the inequities in the system of school finance and their implications for children's educational opportunities.

Since then, IDRA has broadened its scope to include other issues related to excellence and equity in education. IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework outlined by Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel positions "enlightened public policy" as one of three levers of change, along with engaged citizens and accountable leadership, to strengthen school holding power and student success. Enlightened public policy provides both the appropriate standards and the resources schools need to serve all children.

A Snapshot of What IDRA is Doing

Developing leaders – IDRA's Math and Science Smart (MASS) is a new project funded by the U.S. Department of Education that is a collaboration with five teacher preparation programs and 10 school districts. MASS is recruiting, preparing, placing and retaining a critical mass of highly qualified mid-career professionals and recent graduates as secondary math and science teachers with an English as a second language supplemental endorsement for students in 10 high-need Texas school districts.

Conducting research – IDRA is briefing state policymakers to provide research and analyses of critical issues for the next legislative session. These key issues, as outlined in the article in this newsletter on Page 1, include school finance, school holding power, serving English language learners and disciplinary alternative education programs.

Informing policy – After an investigation by a regional Office for Civil Rights office found that most schools in a particular state were not meeting the requirements of Title IX and were in violation of the law, IDRA's South Central Collaborative for Equity was called on to help. The center provided

Tools for Action continued on next page

Action

specific training for the technical assistance staff of a state department of education on sexual harassment and the law so that it could provide training, support and guidance to schools throughout the state.

Engaging communities – Through its Brown and Mendez Blueprints for Action Dialogues, IDRA is sharing data and strategies for engaging Latino and African American communities. These dialogues are sparking cross-sector and multicultural dialogue and local action about what can be done together, across all racial groups, to create schools that are equitable and excellent for all children. This information is especially important for community members and parents so that the promise of these court decisions, that transformed the nature of U.S. public education, can be fully met.

What You Can Do

Get informed. The Education Trust reports on what states are doing (and not doing) to boost graduation rates and offers specific recommendations for state leaders. *Counting on Graduation* states, “This improvement agenda is designed to support school and district efforts to accurately account for all students, hold them accountable for real improvement, and generate a statewide focus on closing the gaps and increasing graduation rates for all student groups.” The report is available at <http://www2.edtrust.org>.

Get involved. When parents, families and others are actively involved as partners with their schools, students thrive and the community itself is made stronger. Listen to IDRA’s Classnotes podcast episodes “Action for School Change” and “School Holding Power for Every Child,” as IDRA president & CEO, Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, discusses the essence of the dropout problem and what can be taken to guarantee graduation for every student.

Get results. MDRC recently released a report that offers lessons from the last in a series of three high school reform conferences that brought together leaders from 22 midsize urban school districts. The resulting report provides strategies for improving high schools, like clearing stumbling blocks on the road through high school, creating schools where students feel attended to and that they attend, and fostering high-quality academic experiences. You can view the report, *Relationships, Rigor, and Readiness – Strategies for Improving High Schools*, free online at <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/498/full.pdf>.

Strategies for Success – continued from Page 12

our engagement and to keep parents meaningfully engaged by providing them with feedback that is useful?

Successful Strategies

Following are our reflections on some of the highly successful examples of culturally-responsive parent engagement that have been evidenced in one Texas school district. Under the leadership of then-principal Rogelio Lopez del Bosque, Ed.D., Eastwood Academy is an internal charter school within the district. In November of 2007, the school was awarded the bronze medal by the *U.S. News and World Report* as one of the top schools in the nation and made the Texas Board for Educator Certification Honor Roll in 2006-07 and 2007-08. The school population comprises 85 percent low-income students, primarily Hispanic, and was one of only five high schools in the district to receive an *exemplary* rating from the Texas Education Agency at the high school level in Houston.

As a former recipient of the Administrator of the Year Award in 2006-07 for the district’s east section, Dr. López has elevated student scores dramatically in all content areas. He attributes this success in large part to a dynamic staff and to purposeful and meaningful parent engagement strategies. Following are a synopsis of some of the effective strategies Dr. López has used successfully in his school.

Set high expectations for engagement. The acknowledgement of high expectations for successful parent engagement sets a tone that will benefit students, teachers and community. The same high expectations that are set for students also should be set for teachers, staff and parents.

Create space and time to plan together. A sincere commitment at the building level in this school resulted in

Strategies for Success – continued on Page 14

the creation of a designated appropriate space and time to plan together for engagement to occur. The principal created a school that feels welcoming and positive yet not patronizing through his expectations of how parents are to be welcomed and respected. An open door policy for teachers and students is critical and for the parents as well.

At the beginning of each school year, create a plan with staff on how to involve parents, explore the benefits of such involvement and what you will be doing to bring everyone, staff and parents, together. Key topics words that parents like to discuss are rigor, discipline and communication.

Begin with the premise that parents do care and know what they need for themselves and their children. Key questions to ask: Does the school know what parents' needs are? What opportunities have been provided or will be provided for parents to give feedback? How will the school use this information in a meaningful way to respond to their needs? What needs do they have that could be provided through community services? Issues that may arise at home where there is no support do affect the learning process. It important to *actively* listen to parents.

Find local resources to support engagement and promote the value of diversity. Attend and sponsor local community functions. For example, as parents' requested information and knowledge about technology, Dr. López offered a space for classes in technology and was able to provide a computer for each participant through his outreach and connections with the local business community. Open the school and the library for the entire community in addition to students' parents.

Publicly acknowledge and celebrate parent engagement. When parents are recognized, they feel appreciated and valued and always respond enthusiastically. The principal

at this school planned celebrations on a regular, ongoing basis for parents and staff to participate together. He also acknowledged the contributions of parents through awards and recognition ceremonies that valued and honored their contributions. Parents were encouraged to participate in site-based management and decisions, the school-community advisory board, school field trips, and parent teacher organization fundraisers and student interventions.

Become a parent engagement advocate. Rather than perpetuating the erroneous myth that parents do not care or are not involved, pro-actively affirm that parents do have high expectations for their children and that they care deeply about their academic success. To counteract any blaming and negativity, be an advocate and cite examples of successful parent engagement. Be responsible for generating a different mindset with ideas about how to engage parents successfully.

Ensure ongoing communication and monitoring of engagement. Continuously seek ways to maintain the momentum of engagement, sharing successes, checking and adjusting strategies and moving forward together. Parents really do want to know what is happening in school. They also want to participate but may feel unwelcome or intimidated because of language barriers between parents and teachers. Therefore, plan for meetings to be held in the language of the community, with sufficient child care support and during times that are convenient for parents. Offer feedback and ask for feedback on a regular basis and make a point of de-mystifying school procedures and school jargon for parents. When parents develop that needed level of trust and confidence in the school, they begin asking more and more questions related to implications of grades, attendance, testing and higher education.

Keep the focus on children's academic success at the center of all engagement activities. This means

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aligning talk to action and focusing on keeping parents informed and involved, making them an integral part of the teaching and learning process for student academic success. Parents are eager, willing and ready for engagement. As their children's first teachers, they have much to offer. Parents are the integral component of keeping the public in public schools and of helping to create a climate where high school graduation for *all* students is ensured.

Creating and maintaining effective parent engagement is a process that requires both the will and the skill to form relationships with parents and community that are long-lasting, focused on academic success and mutually respectful. The execution of these and other effective strategies can yield significant results that improve the quality of the teaching and learning process for generations to come. We must practice on being true and caring listeners of parents rather than simply hearing what they have to say.

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that the current practice of aggregating LEP scores for students in grades three through 11 tends to mask notable student under-achievement at the secondary level; and that after 25 years of an obviously ineffective secondary level ESL program, major improvements are needed at that level.

The state is required to come up with a plan to address these issues by January 2009. It is rumored that the state will request a stay of the Judge's order. But mandate or not, it is expected that some efforts will be mounted legislatively to address the issues raised in this federal court ruling.

For more information on other issues in Texas regarding serving English language learners, see "Bilingual Education in Texas" on Page 3.

Student Dropouts

Though the state of Texas has continued to focus some energies on addressing what is recognized as one of the worst dropout rates in the country, IDRA research finds that the state of Texas continues to lose one of every three students who enroll at the ninth grade. The year 2007 witnessed a first-time investment in dropout prevention and recovery funding in a new allocation labeled the "high school allotment." Unfortunately, the same monies were allowed to be targeted for enhancing college prep curriculum or college enrollment efforts, which created internal competition within districts for the same funds.

The effectiveness of the new effort also was somewhat neutralized by its distribution *outside* the wealth-adjusted state funding system. This resulted in equal allocations to all school systems based on average attendance in grades nine to 12, though their local capacity to address the issue varied greatly and the extent of their dropout conditions differed.

While there have been some discussions about expanding the level of funding for the allotment, the legislature will have to deal with its lack of equalization features and lack of targeting if the funding strategy is expected to work as intended.

For more information, see IDRA's latest attrition study, "Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2007-08 – At Current Pace, Schools Will Lose Many More Generations," in the October 2008 issue of the *IDRA Newsletter*.

Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs

IDRA and Texas Appleseed research on the state's disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs) suggest that, despite some prior reforms, these efforts have evolved into a largely dysfunctional

most serious offenses will no doubt re-surface in the 2009 session. The success of proposed reforms will again hinge on the extent of resistance from some groups that have seen any change to these provisions as encroachments on local power arrangements.

For an overview of IDRA's recent research findings on Texas DAEPs, see "Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs in Texas" in the May 2008 issue of the *IDRA Newsletter*.

In-Grade Retention

In an unexpected development, an interim committee has announced its intention to recommend de-linking Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAKS) test performance to in-grade retention. Testimony and related research indicate that such linkages are an ineffective response to student

Short on money and long on needs, state leaders will be once again charged with making difficult decisions. Whether they reflect the vision and courage that the situation requires, as noted earlier, remains to be seen.

response that is creating a tracking mechanism to push low-income and minority pupils out of Texas public schools. The fact that these programs impact more than 100,000 students is in itself cause for concern. Add the over-representation of African American pupils at the elementary level, the over-representation of low-income and minority pupils at all levels, the large gaps in achievement and dropout rates between DAEP and non-DAEP pupils, and it becomes understandable why these programs have been called a "lawsuit waiting to happen."

Continuing emphasis on improving coordination efforts between sending schools and DAEPs, placing stronger emphasis on more in-school based interventions and making DAEPs a tool for addressing only the

under-achievement. Discussions recently arose to return promotion and in-grade retention decisions to the local educators who are closest to the student setting involved.

There is a possibility that the recommendation will be opposed by some who insist on blaming and punishing students for what may really be caused by ineffective instruction. The extent of how much opposition may surface is as yet unclear.

For background information on the ineffectiveness of in-grade retention, see IDRA's policy brief, *Failing Our Children – Finding Alternatives for In-Grade Retention*, which is available free at IDRA's web site (www.idra.org).

Texas Top 10 Percent Plan

Higher education advocates from around the country will continue to monitor the effects of the Texas Top 10 Percent Plan, a law that requires automatic admission of all students graduating in the top 10 percent of their high school class into a state-funded institution of higher education. This promises to be another battleground in 2009 due to continuing pressure from the University of Texas to alter the plan to limit the number of Top 10 Percent Plan students it must include in its freshmen admissions, countered by recognition that the plan has worked well by increasing both the number of rural and inner-city high schools represented in the entering classes and by growth in the minority enrollments.

Compounding the debates is the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's move toward requiring use of a standardized approach to computing high school grade point averages for

college admission purposes. Growing resentment from local school districts of increasing state encroachment into some local policies and ongoing controversies over what is to be included or excluded in a new GPA calculation are likely to make this a point of friction in the upcoming legislative session.

If the new GPA is tied to moves to modify the Top 10 Percent Plan and to use the state standardized GPAs to determine admission, one can expect major debates on the effects of these new mandates on different schools.

For more information, see IDRA's recent research, *Ten Percent Plan in Texas – Policy Brief*, which is available free at IDRA's web site (www.idra.org).

All of these deliberations will be set in a context of lower than expected budget surpluses. Short on money and long on needs, state leaders will be once again charged with making difficult decisions. Whether they reflect the vision and courage that the situation

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requires, as noted earlier, remains to be seen, with those answers probably not available until the early days in June.

Albert Cortez, Ph.D., is director of IDRA Policy. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

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substitute teachers working with LEP students. Persistent shortages of fully qualified staff have led to the area being classified as a critical shortage area.

Efforts to increase the bilingual and ESL teacher pool have ranged from providing federally subsidized stipends to encourage more teacher candidates to enter the field, to local efforts designed to encourage high school graduates to pursue bilingual education or ESL certification – also known as “grow your own programs.” A third strategy used in a few states attempts to recruit teachers from other countries that may have the teaching credentials and language skills needed. A caveat in such efforts has been the recognized need to educate non-U.S. trained educators about the philosophy and framework under-girding the U.S. education system (that all students have a right to a public education, that differing languages and cultures are valued, that parents play a central, critical role in the education of their children, that schools belong primarily to the communities they serve, etc.), which in some cases are very distinct from countries where public education is primarily directed from the national level.

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English language learners

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Texas LEP Student Grade Level Distribution – 2007-08

Grade Level	LEP Student Identified	Percent of LEP Total Identified	Cumulative Percent of LEP Total Identified
EE	314	0.04	0.04
PK	82,521	10.64	10.68
K	98,743	12.73	23.42
1	104,334	13.45	36.87
2	98,242	12.67	49.54
3	88,982	11.48	61.02
4	68,697	8.86	69.87
5	49,509	6.38	76.26
6	38,946	5.02	81.28
7	31,672	4.08	85.37
8	26,037	3.36	88.72
9	37,194	4.80	93.52
10	22,616	2.92	96.44
11	15,433	1.99	98.43
12	12,192	1.57	100.00
Total	775,432	100.00	

Source: Texas Education Agency, LEP Students By Category and Language, School Year 2007-08 Fall PEIMS Data

A second important issue impacting program operations has involved the **funding** provided to schools to implement the specialized services required for these LEP pupils. While the state program provides supplemental targeted funding for schools serving LEP students, the funding levels have long been recognized as less than what is needed to provide appropriate services (Robledo and Cortez, 2008). The result has been either implementation of programs that are extensively subsidized by local tax revenues, or absent those subsidies efforts that are operated at less than optimum, underfunded, levels.

Studies dating back to the 1970 estimate bilingual program funding needs to be about 30 percent to 40 percent over those provided to regular program pupils. Additional research

notes that actual add-on costs can vary by type of instructional model used, with higher costs associated with strategies that use extra teachers to provide specialized instruction, in contrast to those programs that use bilingual or ESL certified teachers in self contained classrooms. Texas currently provides a 10 percent add-on funding for its bilingual and ESL programs.

A related issue involves the extent of inclusion or **test accommodation** provided to LEP students in state assessment systems and especially those assessments tied into the state and more recently adopted federal school accountability systems. Concerns about the impact of LEP performance on school and district ratings have led to an increasing push to exempt some

Bilingual Education – continued on Page 18

LEP pupils from accountability systems or provide for other mechanisms that lessen the effects of LEP performance on school and district ratings.

Another emerging issue is the potential **competition for teaching and fiscal resources** from local enrichment language programs that include non-LEP students and the mandated programs that are essential to ensuring that those students with the most need have access to all the resources needed to address civil rights based concerns. The tensions between complying with civil rights and access to instruction requirements for LEP students and accommodating non-LEP pupils who simply want to develop skills in a second language

could be ameliorated if the state greatly expanded the bilingual teacher pool and provided substantial increases in state funding. Until such time, legal experts would contend that students requiring bilingual programs to simply have access to comprehensible instruction should get first priority.

Resources

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Robledo Montecel, M., & Cortez, A. (in press). "The Cost of Bilingual Education: What We Know and What is Needed," *Encyclopedia on Bilingual Education* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications).

Texas Education Agency. Enrollment in Texas

Public Schools. Table 10. Enrollment for Instructional Programs and Special Populations, Texas Public Schools 1995-96 through 2005-06 (Austin, Texas: TEA).

Texas Education Agency. Enrollment in Texas Public Schools. Table 2. Statewide Enrollment, Texas Public Schools, 1987-88 through 2005-06 (Austin, Texas: TEA).

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United States vs. Texas Motion to Enforce Civil Action 5281. 1981.

Albert Cortez, Ph.D., is director of IDRA Policy. Roy L. Johnson is director of IDRA Support Services. Comments and questions may be directed to them via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In September, IDRA worked with **7,156** teachers, administrators, parents and higher education personnel through **42** training and technical assistance activities and **155** program sites in **12** states plus Brazil. Topics included:

- ◆ Brown and Mendez Blueprint Dialogues for Action
- ◆ Six-Step Vocabulary Process: Building Academic Vocabulary
- ◆ Trainer of Trainers - Diversity Team
- ◆ State of Literacy in San Antonio

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◆ South San Antonio Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- ◆ Laredo Community College
- ◆ Grand Prairie ISD, Texas
- ◆ Arizona State Department of Education
- ◆ Texas Education Service Center, Region 20

For information on IDRA services for your school district or other group, contact IDRA at 210-444-1710.

Activity Snapshot

There has been a shortage of qualified bilingual teachers and math and science teachers in Texas for many years. The Transitions and the Math and Science Smart programs are alternative teacher certification programs designed to increase the number of fully-qualified and credentialed bilingual/ESL and math and science teachers working with English language learners in "high-need" schools. These IDRA projects support teacher preparation and certification through alternative teacher certification routes for bilingual and Spanish dominant career-changing professionals and recent college graduates – in fields other than education – who desire to enter teaching and have a specific interest in bilingual education. These programs are funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

Regularly, IDRA staff provides services to:

- ◆ public school teachers
- ◆ parents
- ◆ administrators
- ◆ other decision makers in public education

Services include:

- ◆ training and technical assistance
- ◆ evaluation
- ◆ serving as expert witnesses in policy settings and court cases
- ◆ publishing research and professional papers, books, videos and curricula

The Power of Listening – continued from Page 10

“This picture is of a broken fence in the back of my school. I saw something very symbolic in the shot, and I wanted to capture that. Because the fence looks and appears to be broken, I felt that the fence represented and symbolized the promises desired from the Brown/Mendez cases. While they appeared to be fixed on the surface, if you look deeper or beyond the surface there is still much to be changed and fixed. We cannot continue to just attempt to mend those problems of which the cases fought for. We have come a long way but we have still have further to go.”

Student Voice to Inform Instructional Practice

As we work with schools, we bring this amplification of student voice and perspective to the foreground with surveys and interviews, we help teachers elicit student perspective and then use that information to inform and strengthen instructional practice. We help teachers engage students in their classrooms as active contributors and, in doing so, teachers often learn as much as their students do.

One recent example involved more than 100 high school English

language learner students surveyed by IDRA for their perspectives on what needed improvement in their school’s quality teaching and programmatic and instructional practices. Students were asked, “What helps you learn to read and write in English?” Their responses proved invaluable to teachers as they compared what English language learner students said worked best for them and what teachers were actually doing in the classroom. See box on Page 10 for a sample of their insights.

As teachers, school administrators and staff listen to students differently, they begin to *see* them differently, and the result is a school that respects and honors the inherent dignity of everyone who passes through its front door, giving students safe passage to their future.

We see this transformation time and again. It speaks volumes about valuing young people, listening to them and remembering the power of student voice.

“One voice can change a room, and if a voice can change a room, it can change a city. And if it can change a city, it can change a state. And if it can change a state, it can change a nation. And if it can change a nation, it can change the world.” (Barack Obama, Nov. 3, 2008

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Excerpts from student
presentations on the
promise of Brown and
Mendez

Podcasts about dialogues
with parents and students

Comments from Coca-Cola
Valued Youth Program
tutors

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speech, Manassas, Virginia.)

Resources

Sullivan, E. *Deprived of Dignity, Degrading Treatment and Abusive Discipline in New York City and Los Angeles Public Schools* (New York, N.Y.: National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, 2007).

Josie Danini Cortez, M.A., is an IDRA senior education associate. Comments and questions may be directed to her via e-mail at comment@idra.org

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Episode 44: “Beyond the Worksheet in the Science Classroom” IDRA Classnotes Podcast – Veronica Betancourt, M.A., an IDRA education associate and developer of IDRA’s Science Smart! model, describes the purposes of using worksheets in the classrooms and engaging alternatives to their overuse.



Episode 42: “Action for School Change” IDRA Classnotes Podcast – In the first of a set of podcast episodes on this topic, IDRA president and CEO, María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D, describes the four elements in the Quality School Action Framework that must be in place for schools to be successful.



Episode 43: “Families and Teachers Communicating” IDRA Classnotes Podcast – After recently serving as a high school principal for five years, Dr. Rogelio López del Bosque shares how he created a culture of engagement among teachers and parents that welcomed and even expected dialog for student success.



Episode 41: “College Access for Low Income and Minority Students” IDRA Classnotes Podcast – Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed., director of the IDRA Texas Parent Information and Resource Center, gives examples of how K-12 schools can actively support college access for their students.

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